



# BLM - ALASKA FRONTIERS

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When the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) ended the Homestead Act, almost all available lands in the Lower 48 had been claimed, but FLPMA granted Alaska an additional 10 years to file certain types of claims for available public lands managed by BLM. These claims included five-acre homesites, five-acre head-quarter sites, and 80-acre trade and manufacture sites for business ventures. Available land was limited, but after meeting certain requirements, including occupancy, claimants could get the land for \$2.50 an acre. Claims were filed near Slana, and about 85 more for land near Lake Minchumina.

How successful were they? More than 70 percent of the would-be settlers packed up and left. Harsh, long winters in Interior Alaska took their toll and people unprepared for the conditions suffered the most. Many tried to live year-round in drafty, hastily built tiny cabins or tents, with winter temperatures plummeting down to -60°F. Of the 786 original claims for land filed in the Slana area, more than half were abandoned — casualties of harsh, miserable winters and the realization that there were few employment opportunities. Of those who stayed, only 212 had their claims formally examined to verify that they met minimal occupancy requirements, and several failed. Ten patents were awarded around Lake Minchumina. Fewer than 20 unresolved claims currently exist statewide, and when these are finalized, the legacy of “free” land in the U.S. will be history.

Publicity in the 1980s and '90s, including a radio commentary by Paul Harvey and a segment on the Oprah Winfrey show, continues to draw thousands of people from all over, and like the pioneers before them, many express their hopes for a new beginning — and their disappointment to find out that the program no longer exists.

## Alaska's homestead era comes to an end



This cabin is located in the Bureau of Land Management's Glennallen District, near the settlement of Slana, the last area that had land available for homesteading. Under the Homestead Act, more than 800 claims were filed and just over 100 claimants received patent to a cumulative total of approximately 600 acres of land. A few dozen claims still await final adjudication.

Since the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 abolished all federal land programs relating to homesteading in Alaska by 1986, there are no federal lands in Alaska available for homesteading. Congress directed the federal government to manage any remaining public land in Alaska for long-term retention.

# It's been 20 years since ANILCA was signed — but who's counting?



In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA); 20 years later, Carter still claims it as one of the greatest accomplishments of his administration. Alaska's congressional delegation and others, however, criticized the bill, calling it a "land lockup" and saying the state shouldn't be controlled by Outside idealists who don't understand Alaska realities.

To get ANILCA passed, compromises were made, and battles are still being waged in Congress and courts over interpretations of the act. ANILCA declared 104 million acres of Alaska land as national parks, wildlife refuges, and national forests or other federal conservation units. It doubled the size of both the country's National Park System and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), tripled the acreage of protected wilderness that is off-limits to any development, and established eight million acres of wilderness within ANWR. The coastal plain was deliberately left undesignated for either development or preservation, and the decision to drill there was left up to Congress.

ANILCA and subsequent amendments modified sections of both the Statehood Act and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Through ANILCA, Congress granted a subsistence priority for rural residents, Native or non-Native, but the Alaska State Legislature has refused to add a rural priority to the state constitution, saying it would

"All of a sudden all these conservationists are coming out of the woodwork to tell us how to save Alaska."

— Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens

discriminate against urban Alaskans. As a result, the federal government took over subsistence management on federal lands in 1999, and the State is appealing that decision in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Under ANILCA, villages in Western Alaska are prohibited from small-scale drilling for natural gas that could fuel their homes, and the federal government has the authority to decide where a village locates its landfill. ANILCA did allow for several major mining projects, including the Red Dog zinc mine near Kotzebue, and the Greens Creek silver mine in Southeast, but small-scale placer miners found their activities restricted or even suspended. Sport hunting was allowed in millions of acres of national preserves and wildlife refuges, but hunting guides lost ground to national parks. Snowmachines, motorboats and other vehicles were allowed in parks if their use had been customary.

Questions arise as to where and for what purposes is access allowed on public lands protected under ANILCA? Since much of Alaska is accessible only by plane, many residents feel ANILCA closed off numerous areas to all but the very rich who can afford the high costs of remote travel within the state. What are acceptable means of access? Are airplanes, motorboats and snowmachines appropriate everywhere, for any purpose? Or only in certain places, for specific purposes?

In the meantime, President Clinton is being lobbied to designate ANWR and the Copper River Delta as national monuments before he leaves office.

"Our ideals, laws and customs should be based on the proposition that each generation in turn becomes the custodian rather than the absolute owner of our resources — and each generation has the obligation to pass this inheritance on to the future."

— Alden Whitman

## Changing times require changes in planning

Former BLM Director Tom Fry says it's clear that BLM is facing formidable challenges, such as conflicts between wildlands and suburban sprawl, and increasing off-highway vehicle use in recreation areas. The answer? Update the land-use planning process and encourage ideas and feedback from the public to tailor the most effective plans possible.) "We want to make sure we get a wide range of input," says Fry. "We need partnerships with other agencies, organizations, and individuals so we can address site-specific resource issues."

Under federal law, the BLM prepares land-use plans that serve as the basis for all activities including livestock grazing, energy development, recreation, and natural resource protection. The proposed guidance updates a land-use planning manual prepared by the BLM in the 1980s. Changes to the planning process are intended to encourage public participation, and simplify updating and amending land-use plans when necessary, for example, to protect threatened or endangered species.

BLM manages 264 million acres of surface land and 560 million acres of subsurface mineral estate throughout the nation, mostly located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The agency also oversees livestock grazing, mining, and conservation of natural, historical, cultural and other resources. For more information, visit [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov) or write to BLM Planning, Assessment & Comm. Support Group, 1849 C St. NW, MS 1050 LS, Washington, D.C. 20240-0001, or call 202-452-5110.

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"What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

— Henry David Thoreau

## BLM honors Carter for signing ANILCA

Former BLM Director Tom Fry presented a *Legacy of the Land* award, BLM's highest honor, to former President Jimmy Carter, in Anchorage last August. Fry spoke of Carter's "extraordinary contribution to the protection of the land and its resources in signing into law the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) on December 2, 1980."

ANILCA established conservation units throughout Alaska to be administered by the BLM, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It guaranteed that BLM would manage in perpetuity more than 70 million acres of public land in Alaska under the principles of multiple use.

"The vast lands protected by ANILCA are some of the world's most spectacular natural treasures," said Fry. "President Carter's foresight 20 years ago has given the American people a lasting gift of immeasurable value."

BLM conservation units established in Alaska by ANILCA include:

Δ The 1.2 million-acre Steese National Conservation Area, about 70 miles northeast of Fairbanks. BLM manages the area's minerals, recreation, wildlife and other resource values. The 26 mile Pinnell Mountain National Recreational Trail offers outstanding views of the surrounding countryside, and is known for its summer wildflowers and views of the "midnight sun."

Δ The one million-acre White Mountains National Recreation Area (WMNRA), named for its unusual limestone cliffs. BLM developed an extensive network of winter trails and shelter cabins, and the area has become a winter playground for snow machiners, dog mushers and cross-country skiers.

Δ Six National Wild and Scenic Rivers (NWSR) for BLM to manage, including the Beaver and Birch creeks northeast of Fairbanks, the Gulkana and Delta rivers near Paxson, the Unalakleet River in Western Alaska, and the Fortymile River near the Canadian border. At 392 miles, the Fortymile has more miles in NWSR status than any other river in the system.

## Free land, gold mines, a fresh start — the stuff of dreams to early settlers

Three historic laws in 1862 spurred the movement west. Land granted under the Pacific Railroad Act enabled the speedy construction of the Union Pacific, Central Pacific, Northern Pacific, Santa Fe and Southern Pacific railroads. Under the Morrill Act, land grants financed the establishment of state universities and agricultural colleges. And under the famed Homestead Act, settlers obtained free 160-acre homesteads. Of the 1.8 billion acres disposed of by the GLO during the 19th and early 20th centuries, two-thirds went to citizens, corporations and the states. Railroads received more than 94 million acres, while homesteaders ultimately claimed almost 290 million acres. All this built the country's economic foundation, opened the West to settlement, and united the vast expanses of territory into one nation. Many of the remaining lands were set aside for national forests, wildlife refuges, parks and monuments. At its peak in the 1880s, the GLO rarely had more than a thousand employees.

The westward movement, however, was fueled particularly by the discoveries of gold, silver and other valuable minerals on public lands. Thousands who rushed to California in 1849 were followed by other waves to Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Montana and Colorado in the 1850s and 1860s as mineral strikes there were publicized.

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"There are many in this old world of ours who hold that things break about even for all of us. I have observed, for example, that we all get the same amount of ice. The rich get it in the summertime and the poor get it in the winter."

— Bat Masterson

## Follow those minerals!

The Mining Law of 1872 allowed eager prospectors to mark their claims and file notice, but they were not required to prove mineral production within a reasonable time. In return, thousands of acres of public land became encumbered with claims of no public or private benefit. The Minerals Leasing Act of 1920 partially remedied this problem, however, by requiring private producers to pay the federal government minimal rent and royalties on oil, coal or other minerals produced from public lands leased from the General Land Office.



The Dalton Cache is a pre-Klondike Gold Rush outpost built around 1895 by Jack Dalton for storing trading goods before transport over Chilkat Pass into the Yukon Territory. When the Klondike Gold Rush hit in 1897-98, the cache became a stopping place for miners streaming toward Dawson. Though partially restored and marked by an interpretive sign, it is not open to the public today.

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"Liberty is being free from the things we don't like in order to be slaves of the things we do like."

— Ernest Benn





# Wild West ended when settlers took leave of their “census”

In 1890, America’s Western Frontier officially came to an end. For the first time the federal census showed only pockets of unsettled land were left in the West. The civilization “back East” had sprawled across the continent and gradually consumed the rugged Frontier “out West.”

In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner wrote his *Frontier Thesis* of American history in which he argued that much of America’s character was not a product of European settlers, but rather a special dynamic created by the “waves” of people coming to unsettled Western regions of North America, and their interactions with that frontier environment.

Early transitory explorers, trappers, miners, and later, permanent settlers moved west to the relatively cheap or even free land and the economic opportunities it represented. Prior to the Civil War, certain federal land acts had encouraged settlers to move west, but it was Lincoln’s signing of the Homestead Act in 1862 that drew hundreds of thousands of people west. From the 1840s into the 1890s and on, pioneers came in covered wagons and boats, or later by trains, lured by the free or cheap land, and a fresh start.

My own family members were among those drawn by the hope of a “better day.” My King great-great-grandparents left eastern Iowa by covered wagon in the spring of 1870, and after stops in Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, the Dakota Territory and Oregon, they rolled into the Washington Territory in 1888. My mother’s father and grandparents came later by train to Washington (by then a state) in the late 1890s, homesteading some of the marginal lands still available. In the 1920s, other relatives drove Model T’s to file Homestead and Desert Land Entry claims in Montana. Millions of Americans can recite similar stories of their own family history.

America is a much different place now than in the 1800s. And the future? While here



Matthew Eugene Adams (1871-1943) and his wife Edna Yeaman (1886-1972) pose for their wedding photo taken in 1917 in Danville, Virginia. Matthew came to Washington state by train with his father in 1897; the rest of the family followed in 1898. Matthew filed for a homestead in Franklin County, Washington. Later, he became widowed and when he was visiting relatives in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, he met Edna — a “maiden school teacher” boarding with some of his cousins. A romance was sparked despite the 15-year age difference, and he brought her back from Virginia to his homestead. They had one child, the author’s mother.

in Alaska, we still may be able to buy some remote land parcels from the state government (at an appraised fair-market value, however), it will never be the same. When the flickers of all those dreams are finally extinguished, we will have lost a little bit more of what it was to be an American.

— Dr. Robert King



Benjamin King (1839-1921) and his wife, MargaretAnn Dupuy (1847-1899) pose for their wedding photo in 1865 in Jackson County, Iowa. They left by covered wagon in the spring of 1870, reaching Washington Territory in 1888.



The author's great-grandparents, James Madison Adams (1845-1923) and his wife, Emily Williams (1849-1903), in Missouri about 1890. James has the lighter beard and a white shirt; the other man with the dark beard is his brother, Thomas Jefferson Adams. The rest are the eight sons of James and Emily (no daughters!). James left southern Virginia in 1883, due to the terrible post-Civil War economy, settling in Missouri before moving his family to eastern Washington state in 1897-98.

## Varoom!!! Faster than a covered wagon!

Wheel tracks have criss-crossed the American West for more than 200 years, but nowadays, the tracks are wider and there are a lot more of them. Suburban sprawl and advancing technology have turned once-remote public lands into off-highway vehicle (OHV) playgrounds, and the number of endangered and threatened flora and fauna on BLM land has jumped from just over 50 in 1982 to nearly 300 in 1997.

BLM policies on OHV use date back to 1972, when only about five million OHVs were in use nationally. Outdated land use plans don't reflect the increase in use or changes in the environment, and the budget for recreational specialists and law enforcement personnel hasn't kept pace either. BLM plans to have new guidance in place by November 30.

Existing OHV regulations cover about 90 percent of BLM public lands. About 37 percent of that — 94,850,054 acres — is open to OHV use. Travel is permitted off existing roads and trails in these areas, including sand dunes and dry lake beds; 49 percent of the remaining land is designated "limited" with four percent closed to motor vehicle use. Limited-access areas generally restrict vehicle use to designated roads or trails.

BLM wants to protect natural resources while OHV use increases. "We're hoping people will help us develop reasonable guidance, says former BLM Director Tom Fry. "We want to focus our efforts toward on-the-ground solutions rather than tying up scarce resources in litigation, protests and appeals." BLM plans to have a new guidance plan by November 30.

## Managing places for wide-open spaces

BLM oversees more than 1,000 recreational sites, but its end goal is to preserve "wide-open spaces" for hiking, camping, fishing and other recreation. Several months ago, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt asked former BLM Director Tom Fry to create a management system for certain BLM areas that would be similar to the National Park Service systems.

Under the newly-created Office of the National Land Conservation System (ONLCS), BLM sites such as national conservation areas, and national scenic and historic trails, differ from national parks in that the focus is on conservation. Visitors are encouraged, but to help preserve the open land character, visitor contact and information facilities will be located in nearby communities or at the edge of the units.

"The ONLCS does not create new legal protections," says Fry. "It doesn't recommend new designations, nor does it directly manage units in the system — that authority remains in the field. We want to provide more intensive management of areas by their related missions." For example, oversight of a wilderness area follows requirements set by the Wilderness Act. Multiple-use activities, such as grazing and hunting, will continue as long as they are consistent with the overall purpose of the area.

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"I'd rather wake up in the middle of nowhere than in any city on earth."  
— Steve McQueen

## Director Fry swaps land duty for ocean industry

BLM national Director Tom Fry is leaving BLM to become President of the National Ocean Industries Association, a trade association in Washington, D.C. Fry was named Deputy Director in January 1997, and served as BLM's Acting Director from November 1998 until his Senate confirmation last May.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt praised Fry for his service, saying, "Tom led the BLM at a time when the Bureau's management portfolio has expanded to include National Monuments. This change marks a significant new chapter in BLM's history. Tom Fry played a key role."

Last June, Fry created BLM's National Landscape Conservation System which provides general guidance for management of new National Monuments, congressionally designated national Conservation and Wilderness areas, and other environmentally sensitive areas.

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## BLM releases Ketchikan geophysical survey report

Copies of BLM-Alaska Open File Report 79, *Ketchikan Airborne Geophysical Survey: Geologic and Geographic Data Sets*, are available from major libraries throughout the state, and BLM's Juneau Mineral Information Center at 100 Savikko Road, Douglas, AK 99824. It is the first report BLM released to the public on compact disk, and includes data layers of geophysics, geology, geochemistry, land status, roads, and mineral assessment information for an area near Ketchikan and Prince of Wales Island.

## BLM publishes final EIS on proposed 3809 surface mining regulations

BLM published a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on its proposal to upgrade its "3809" surface mining regulations. BLM plans to issue its final, revised regulations before the end of the year. Notice of the EIS availability appeared in the October 20 *Federal Register*.

The Mining Law governs hardrock mining on federal lands for minerals such as gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, uranium and molybdenum. BLM has not changed its "3809" regulations — found in subpart 3809 of the agency's mineral rules — since 1980.

Over the past two decades, the scope and technology of hardrock mining on federal lands have changed considerably, as well as BLM's knowledge about environmental impacts of mining and ways to control these impacts. The BLM initiated its regulatory upgrade effort in 1991, but held up further 3809 work for several years while Congress considered

making major reforms in the Mining Law of 1872. In early 1997 Interior Secretary Babbitt ordered the rulemaking process to be completed.

The final EIS contains a Preferred Alternative that would update the BLM's 20-year-old existing surface mining regulations, and help prevent "unnecessary or undue degradation" of BLM lands from hardrock mining, as stated in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The Preferred Alternative would help the agency protect public health, public land resources, and the environment. It would also ensure that mining operators, rather than the nation's taxpayers, bear the costs of reclaiming mined lands.

This approach to reclamation funding, which will add costs to mining operations, was prompted by several major mining operations that failed in recent years, leaving cleanup costs to the public.

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